



21 May 2024

Hon Brooke van Velden
Minister of Internal Affairs
Parliament Buildings
Wellington

Email: B.vanVelden@ministers.govt.nz

Dear Minister,

Proposed Fire and Emergency Fire Service Levy Settings for 2026-2029

The New Zealand Institute of Forestry (NZIF), representing approximately 900 members, with aims to advance forest practices in all forests advocates for effective fire management in our forests and rural landscapes. Our focus is on preventing unwanted fires and protecting New Zealand's plantations, natural forests, and rural areas through a comprehensive and integrated approach.

We are concerned about the significant increase in fire levy expenditure by Fire and Emergency NZ (FENZ) since 2017, which has not corresponded with a reduction in unwanted fires. The expenditure rose from \$389 million in 2017 to \$737 million in 2022/23, with a proposed increase to \$898 million for 2026-2029. Specifically, the vegetation fire response cost is projected at \$250.3 million annually. In contrast, before 2017, the annual expenditure for rural fire management was \$35 million, with a decrease in the area burnt by unwanted fires.

Under the previous rural fire structure, Rural Fire Authorities (RFAs) reported annually against Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) to the National Rural Fire Authority (NRFA). This system was effective, with no significant performance concerns and a downward trend in the area burnt. Since 2017, there has been a lack of transparency and an overall increase in burnt land, including a six-fold increase in Public Crown Lands.

Given FENZ's increased expenditure and lack of improved outcomes, NZIF questions the justification for further levy increases. We recommend an independent post-implementation review of the 2017 merger of urban and rural fire services.



New Zealand Institute of Forestry

Te Pūtahi Ngāherehere o Aotearoa Incorporated

If possible we would request a meeting with you to discuss these concerns and provide further information. Please advise a suitable date and time.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'J Treadwell', written in a cursive style.

James Treadwell (*RMNZIF and Fellow*)

President

Advancing the Profession of Forestry in Aotearoa