

Forest and Rural Fire Landscape Performance Assessment Concerns

Under the Fire and Emergency NZ Act 2017 (the Act), Fire and Emergency New Zealand (FENZ) has legislative responsibility for the reduction, readiness, response, and recovery activities involving unwanted vegetation fires in New Zealand.

When required, the forestry sector supports FENZ to prevent the spread of unwanted vegetation fires within or threatening forestry lands. Large forest owners generally have a forest fire plan that supports the functions of FENZ in the management of fire in the forest and rural landscape.

As a Crown entity, FENZ must produce a Statement of Performance Expectations (SPE) under the Crown Entities Act 2004 to support accountability, transparency, and good performance. The purpose of a SPE is to:

- Enable the responsible Minister to participate in setting the annual performance expectations of the Crown entity
- Enable Parliament to be informed of those expectations, and
- Provide a base against which actual performance can be assessed.

The SPE is a critical document for FENZ as it is the document that requires FENZ to set out what it will deliver and how it will report on its progress and performance. This reporting enables the monitoring department, ie., the Department of Internal Affairs and the Minister of Internal Affairs, to fulfill their roles.

Given the required prerequisite of the FENZ SPE, the forestry sector holds severe concerns about the lack of meaningful FENZ key performance indicators for fire management in the forest and rural landscape.

To validate these concerns, the following outlines the only rural vegetation fire-related outputs in the 2023/24 FENZ (SPE), which covers the forest and rural fire landscape key performance indicator (KPI) measures 1.1.3 and 2.1.3:

- 1) Output – Assist in setting fire safety standards and granting certification or approval

Measure 1.1.3

Percentage of fire permits processed within the required timeframe (Fewer than five working days for emailed permits, no site visit required. Fewer than ten working days for emailed permits, site inspection required. Fewer than 15 working days for posted permits application or where manual application form is used.)

2023/24 Target – Greater than 95%

- 2) Output - Response to fire

Measure 2.1.3

Percentage of vegetation fire arrived at within 30 minutes (anywhere in NZ)

2023/23 Target – 90%

No other measures related to managing fire in the forest and rural landscape are included in the SPE.

You would be hard-pressed to suggest the two FENZ 2023/24 forest and rural landscape outputs and measures outlined above are meaningful SPE Outputs or Measures. They may be considered useful inputs into meaningful, measurable outputs but are not deemed outputs independently. What would be an example of a suitable set of FENZ Outputs and measures for managing fire in the New Zealand forest and rural landscape where the results were made public each year?

National Rural Fire Authority

Before the merger of urban and rural fire services in July 2017, the National Rural Fire Authority (NRFA) was responsible for assessing the performance of Rural Fire Authorities (RFA). To allow the NRFA to evaluate the annual performance of the RFA's, each RFA was required to report to the NRFA on the following list of performance measures:

Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) For Rural Fire Authorities

Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) were incorporated into the NRFA PAC Category 9 (Results & Outcomes) requirements from 1 July 2011. RFA's were required to report on each KPI through Category 7 of the PAC and to track these annually, showing trends (graphs) over time.

| Objective | Indicator |
|---|--|
| A. Reduce loss of life and injuries | A1 Number of fire deaths |
| | A2 Number of fire injures |
| B. Reduce economic loss | B1 Number of primary dwellings destroyed by wildfire. |
| | B2 Percentage of area of high value/high-risk zones burnt by wildfire. |
| | B3 Percentage of area of commercial plantation burnt by wildfire, per total area. |
| C. Reduce damage to environment, heritage, and cultural assets | C1 Number of cultural and heritage sites damaged by wildfire. |
| D. Number of preventable fires are reduced | D1 Area burnt (hectares) in wildfires by vegetation type, as % of per total area (hectares) of the fire district. |
| | D2 Number of reported non-permitted fires during a restricted fire season, as % versus the total number of reported fires in the Fire District, |
| E. Achieve a Timely Response to Fires | E1 All incidents notified to the RFA are registered with an incident report completed for each incident. |
| | E2 Meet the NRFA minimum standards for Achieving Timely Response to Fires. |
| F. Meet Standards for Fire Equipment, PPE, and Weather Observations | F1 Meet the NRFA minimum standards for Fire Equipment |
| | F2 Meet the NRFA minimum standards for Personnel Protective Equipment. |
| | F3 Meet the NRFA minimum standards for Fire Weather Observation Equipment. |
| H. Maintain Data & Knowledge of fire incidents Origin & Cause | H1 Investigation of fire origin & cause for all fire [Category < 1.0ha] are completed 100% of the time. |
| I. Management of Fire Hazard Assessment & Planning | I1 Meet the NRFA minimum standards for Assessment of Fire Hazard |
| J. Effectively establish Daily Fire Danger and Fire Season Status | J1 The RFA's trigger points for readiness (as linked to the NZ Fire Danger Rating System numeric codes & indices) are in place and defined in the Fire Plan. |
| | J 2 The total number of days by year the RFA is in Open, Restricted, and Prohibited fire season status recorded as a % against the number of days at each trigger point level, |
| K. Learning from Fire Incidents | K 1 Formal Fire Debriefs for all fires [Category < 1.0ha] are held within 30 days of the fire being declared out. Written debrief records of recommendations/actions. |
| L. Knowledge of Fire Use | L1 The number of Fire Permits issued each year by RFA. |
| | L2 The number of escapes reported to RFA from the Fire Permitted Fires. |
| | L3 Total area burnt each year by Prescribed Fire (permitted) in Restricted or Prohibited [special permits] fire seasons. |
| | L4 Area burnt each year by type: a) for Land Conversion and by Fuels Treatment. |
| M. Maintain Operational Readiness for fire suppression operations | M1 Fire pumps are tested and meet the manufacturer's specifications for performance at a minimum of 12 monthly intervals. |
| | M2 Number of fire fighting personnel achieving NRFA training standards by role as a % of the RFA's target number for each fire fighting role. |

Many of the indicators outlined in A to M above have not been externally reported on since July 2017.

Performance Improvement Required for Monitoring Crown Entity

Further evidence supporting the abovementioned concerns was recently highlighted by the Parliament's Governance and Administration Committee, which considered a report by the Controller and Auditor-General (CAG), which looked at improving value through better Crown entity monitoring. The Committee heard from the CAG on 31 August 2023 that some monitoring entities' reporting contains limited performance information, which prevents Ministers from adequately assessing the effectiveness of the relevant Crown entities.

Based on the findings of this review, the Auditor-General recommended to the Governance and Administration Committee that Crown entities and their monitoring departments significantly improve monitoring frameworks and practices.

The Governance and Administration Committee noted a list of recommendations from the Auditor-General, which included:

- (a) Monitoring departments and Crown entities to clearly document the monitoring framework, ensure meaningful engagement in the development of accountability documents, and share knowledge and seek to understand each other's operating context; and
- (b) Monitoring departments to improve the quality of performance reporting.

From a review of the current FENZ Output measures contained within the 2023/24 FENZ SPE relating to the role of FENZ in the management of fire in the forest and rural landscape, the findings of the CAG review are 100% supported.