

The FOA/FFA joint Fire Committee (Fire Committee) met on 8 August for its third quarterly meeting where it navigated a range of topics:

Fire Committee expanding mandate to include Insurance.

New Zealand has seen an increase in severe weather events over the past few years. Unfortunately, the increasing frequency of these events is not unique to New Zealand and the climate-related insurance claims they have generated increasingly affect the insurance market, its affordability and coverage. At its meeting in May, the Forest Growers Levy Trust (FGLT) Board requested that the Fire Committee consider expanding its scope to include exploring tree crop insurance options for the sector. The Fire Committee agreed to take accountability for this and plans to establish an insurance subcommittee to oversee and explore how to access expertise to inform and guide its activities going forward.

Fire strategy

Fire represents an ever-present risk for forest owners and managers due to its serious economic, social, and environmental consequences. The Fire Committee recognised the need for developing a strategy to inform and guide its work programme and its future approach to fire risk management advocacy. A fire strategy is also needed to ensure the industry fulfils its role as a signatory to the Plantation Forestry Rural Fire Control Charter – June 2021. This need has become more acute with the changes that have occurred in recent years with the merger and formation of FENZ and the increasing frequency of adverse climatic events and their contribution to the changing risk of wildfire. Work is underway to engage a facilitator to assist with progressing the development of this strategy with input from several industry and government experts.

Guideline review

The Forest Fire Risk Management Guidelines (<https://www.nzfoa.org.nz/resources/file-libraries-resources/fire/671-forest-fire-risk-management-guidelines-1/file>) remain a critical resource for forest owners to play their part in mitigating and managing wildfire risk and working with FENZ. The Fire Committee has recognised the ongoing value of these guidelines, but that they are in need of an update to account for changes and new information since publication in 2018. Work is currently underway to have these reviewed and updated.

Powerlines research

The Fire Committee engages regularly with FENZ, who recently provided an insightful overview of the findings from a project looking at vegetation fires caused by powerlines. Little previous work had been done in this space prior, and in light of some significant fires in recent years resulting or suspected from powerlines, this project aimed to improve FENZ understanding of the powerline fire risk. The project found that most powerline fires are small and only very few become large. The project findings suggest that a focus on the causes of the larger fires would have the greatest impact and reduce the number of smaller incidents. FENZ is planning to map identified powerline fires and link these to the

analysis findings to better understand the issues. The findings for this analysis can inform regional and local discussion with powerline companies and relevant stakeholders to better understand and manage any risks.

FENZ

Significant inroads have been made to foster collaboration between FENZ and the forestry sector in recent years. The relationship is now becoming increasingly constructive and progressive. To further strengthen this relationship, the Fire Committee and FENZ have confirmed a permanent FENZ representative to attend the Fire Committee meetings. While the current FENZ engagement session at the Committee meetings will continue, having a permanent representative will provide FENZ with greater insight into the challenges that the forestry sector faces and allows the committee and FENZ to work in a more open and collaborative way which can only be beneficial to improving rural fire risk management outcomes.

Department of Internal Affairs

The Fire Committee has also been working to build its relationship with the Department of Internal Affairs (DIA) who are responsible for fire services policy and monitoring of FENZ. The Fire Committee have raised concerns over the lack of performance reporting in the rural environment, and in particular, outcomes for the forestry sector – especially noting FENZ significant cost increases since the merger and the contribution that the forestry sector makes to rural fire capability. The DIA Manager for Monitoring and Appointments, Jeremy Cauchi, attended the meeting to discuss and explore future engagement opportunities for the forestry sector in the performance setting process space. While there don't appear to be any quick fixes, the Committee will continue to explore avenues to influence performance reporting improvements. In turn, this will help in better understanding the performance of services and value for money that FENZ is delivering to rural New Zealand.