



# Fire and Emergency New Zealand Bill

PSA Submission to the Government  
Administration Select Committee

18 August 2016

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### Introduction

#### *Who we are*

The New Zealand Public Service Association Te Pūkenga Here Tikanga Mahi (the PSA) is the largest trade union in New Zealand with over 62,000 members.

We are a democratic organisation representing members in the public service, the wider state sector (the district health boards, crown research institutes and other crown entities), state owned enterprises, local government, tertiary education institutions and non-governmental organisations working in the health, social services and community sectors.

The PSA has been advocating for strong, innovative and effective public and community services since our establishment in 1913. People join the PSA to negotiate their terms of employment collectively, to have a voice within their workplace and to have an independent public voice on the quality of public and community services and how they're delivered.

#### *This submission is built from the views of PSA members affected by this bill*

The Committee will be familiar with the New Zealand Professional Firefighters Union as the union of uniformed firefighters. The PSA is the union for staff of the Fire Service working in non-operational National/Regional/Area support functions. In addition, we share coverage with the NZPFU of those working as volunteer support officers and fire risk management officers. The PSA also has members working in fire services for the Department of Conservation. This submission has been built from views contributed by these PSA members and delegates. It presents the views of each of these groups of PSA members in two separate parts.

## Part one: Matters concerning PSA members working for the New Zealand Fire Service

*We support the creation of a unified fire services organisation*

On the basis of the information available to them, PSA members working for the Fire Service support the establishment of a single, unified fire services organisation for New Zealand, as proposed by the Bill. PSA members are also pleased that the issue of levies is addressed by the Bill.

Properly resourced business services and other Area, Regional and National functions will support the success of the new organisation. The PSA's experience of the bringing together of functions or organisations is that it is often assumed that this is an opportunity for efficiencies and savings, particularly in the area of support. The reality is that such assumptions are always proved false. While it is important that resources are focussed on frontline work, reducing support staff undermines the quality of that frontline work.

The PSA would also like to see unification of the new FENZ extend to providing uniform for all support staff.

*Business and Regional support workloads will increase and staff numbers must increase to compensate*

PSA members working in business and regional support functions anticipate an increased level of workload for them following the establishment of the new organisation. One of the reasons for this is that some support work currently being undertaken by local government will shift to the new agency. Additional data management and reporting work will also transfer from rural fire authorities to regional support functions. We understand that those working specifically in Business Services roles have been told that numbers of business support staff will increase to compensate for some of this work.

The PSA asks the Committee to seek an undertaking from the transition body that the undertaking to increase numbers of support staff to compensate for the anticipated increase in workload will be honoured. We would also like to see some guarantee of continued employment for our members.

*The work of fire risk management officers will increase in complexity and this should be recognised*

It is likely that the shift to the unified service will result in an increase in work complexity for those working as fire risk management officers. For example, a fire risk management officer who, in working for the Fire Service, investigates why a fire may have burned down a dwelling will now be required to investigate why a forestry block has burned down. This increase in complexity will need to be recognised and resourced.

*New role?*

We also request clarification of the definition in the Bill of "Inspector" and in particular whether this is an additional task to be performed by current Fire Risk Management Officers.

*Changes in job size and workload should be reflected in remuneration*

Once the new structure is in place and all affected staff have been transferred to their new roles we will be seeking a re-evaluation of the size of non-operational roles. The anticipated increase in job complexity and workload flowing from the changes put in place by the Bill will result in significant increases in job size and that this should be reflected in remuneration.

*Existing collective agreements should continue to apply in the new agency*

The PSA requests a positive indication that FENZ will continue to work collaboratively with our members, and honour our collective employment agreement. The continued application of the collective employment agreement is not mentioned in the new Bill and this causes members some concern.

We also note that new employees will not be entitled to a gratuity upon their retirement, whereas existing members retain this entitlement. We are concerned about this potential disparity and inequity amongst FENZ employees.

The PSA has expressed an interest in early involvement in the employment aspects of the transition and will raise these issues through that process.

## Part two: Matters concerning PSA members working in fire services for the Department of Conservation

*DOC employs experienced and well trained career fire and emergency managers*

The Department of Conservation is responsible for fire services on public conservation land and currently employs around 28 people to do this work. Four of these people are dedicated fire technical support officers and the work of a further dozen people is dedicated to fire work.

*The medium-term impact on these roles is as yet uncertain*

Part 4, sub-part 1 of the Bill provides for agreement between the Department and FENZ on fire and emergency services on public conservation land and additional land and so it is not yet settled how the respective responsibilities of the two organisations will play out over time. The Bill also explicitly excludes DOC staff from transfer to the new organisation.

While the Department has assured us that it has no current plans to restructure or disestablish the jobs of those it employs in fire services, PSA members working in this area are understandably concerned about the medium-term security of their jobs.

We anticipate that one or two years after the establishment of FENZ, the Department will indeed review these jobs. By that time, the jobs in the new organisation will be filled and opportunities for any affected DOC staff may be limited.

*DOC staff working in fire services seek the option of fair consideration for appropriate positions in the new organisation*

Many of the PSA members working for DOC in its role as a fire authority are career emergency managers, well trained by what was the largest and a leading agency for rural fire in New Zealand. They wish to continue working in their field and have a lot to offer. While they do not suggest that they should have preference over affected staff from rural fire authorities, they are seeking the support of the Committee for a process to give them fair consideration for positions in the new organisation.