

15 July 2003.

Dame Margaret Bazley, DNZM  
Chairperson  
Fire Service Commission  
33 Bowen Street  
P O Box 2133  
Wellington.

Dear Dame Margaret,

I am writing on behalf of the volunteer rural firefighters within the Auckland Region, to request the Commission's assistance in gaining access to training on a proper and regular basis for volunteer rural fire staff.

The subject of basic, practical, generic type, training for our rural staff has been discussed with both the National Rural Fire Authority (NRFA) and the New Zealand Fire Service (NZFS) (Auckland Region).

The result of these discussions has failed to address the basic and urgent need of rural staff for access to a satisfactory level of training in generic firefighting operations.

The amendments to the H&S E Act have identified a serious shortfall in the range of the training received by rural volunteers. This is clearly demonstrated when their response parameters, (in the Districts I am responsible for) result in approximately 20% vegetation and 80% generic type callouts.

Rural Fire Force units regularly respond to non-vegetation fires within their response zones. They also attend non-fire incidents in exactly the same manner as do the NZFS volunteer crews.

They join a Rural Fire Force and make these responses for the same reason as NZFS volunteers, the safety and well-being of their communities. They are composed of people who live within and are supported by, the local community, whose expectations of the service provided do not differentiate between the two agencies. To the average person a fire appliance and crew, is a fire appliance and crew.

Sensibly, it must be accepted that rural crews, especially those within territorial areas will continue to respond to this generic range of emergency incidents. To attempt to restrict the range of their responses would in most cases result in the complete loss of staff.

Their Rural Fire Authority as their governing body, being aware that this range of response is the true situation, has no alternative but to recognise and ensure, for the safety of their staff and to comply with the provisions of the H&S E Act, that the accepted and correct levels of protective clothing, equipment, and training are provided.

Although expensive, clothing and equipment can be purchased; training however requires the background/skill/knowledge of specialist personnel. In the area of operational firefighting, the only competent, relevant and credible source of that training is the NZFS. It is therefore imperative that for the on-going safety of rural crews, regular access to that training is made available.

On the local level cross training between our agencies is accepted as the norm. Where units from both agencies attend together at the same incidents it is recognised as essential for effective incident management, that all parties are able work to the same policies and procedures.

However, in areas of specialised training, those which by the complexity of their subject matter require specialist trainers and venues, major difficulties in access have arisen. It is primarily these areas that are the subject of this request.

It is our request that Commission facilitate the forming of a Committee, possibly comprising of representatives from the NZFS, RFA's and the UFBA, to investigate the subject of a formalised national training policy for rural fire volunteer staff.

A formal policy if implemented would allow sequential skill levels to be programmed for our staff in the areas and to the level required by their actual activity, And would demonstrate that the safety of rural fire volunteers, through the achievement of the correct levels of knowledge and skill is regarded by Commission with the same concern as that shown for Fire Service volunteers.



Peter Barber  
P.R.F.O.  
Waitakere/Rodney/North Shore  
Rural Fire Districts.

Copies to:

Mike Hall  
National Commander                      N.Z.F.S.

Murray Dudfield  
National Rural Fire Officer              N.R.F.A.

Don Roper  
Executive Director                        U.F.B.A.



**New Zealand Fire Service Commission**

Level 5, 33 Bowen Street  
PO Box 2133, Wellington

WAITAKERE CITY COUNCIL

28 JUL 2003

575184

24 July 2003

*Handwritten mark*

Peter Barber  
Principal Rural Fire Officer  
Waitakere/Rodney/North Shore Rural Fire Districts  
Waitakere City Council  
Private Bag 93109  
**HENDERSON**

Dear Peter

I acknowledge receipt of your letter of 15 July regarding the training for volunteer rural fire staff.

I have read your letter and forwarded it to Mike Hall, Chief Executive and National Commander who will address the issues you have raised and reply to you direct. A copy of his reply will be forwarded to me.

Yours sincerely

*Handwritten signature of Dame Margaret Bazley*  
**Dame Margaret Bazley, DNZM  
Chairperson**

Chief Executive	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Corporate Services	<input type="checkbox"/>
City Services Moselle	<input type="checkbox"/>
Consultancy Services	<input type="checkbox"/>
ECO WATER	<input type="checkbox"/>
Strategic Group	<input type="checkbox"/>
Consent Services	<input type="checkbox"/>
Field Services	<input type="checkbox"/>
<i>Cv. Def.</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Working with communities to protect what they value.

**A36**

Phone: 04 496 3643 • Facsimile: 04 499 1260

**Corporate Office & Command Headquarters**

6 AUG 2003

5th Floor, Ministry of Commerce Building, 33 Bowen Street  
PO Box 2133, Wellington

576199

31 July 2003

**Peter Barber**Principal Rural Fire Officer  
Waitakere City Council  
Private Bag 93109  
Henderson  
WAITAKERE CITY

Dear Peter

**VOLUNTEER RURAL FIREFIGHTER TRAINING**

I refer to your letter of 15 July to the Chairperson of the NZ Fire Service Commission. Dame Margaret has referred your letter to me for a response. Your letter was most timely as it raised an issue that requires an urgent national policy response. For that reason I set out my thinking on the matter in some detail below.

At the outset I want to assure you that the NZ Fire Service will make available training opportunities in non-fire skills for members of voluntary rural fire forces *where such training is necessary for the proper performance of the rural fire force's role*. I draw your attention to the words in italics because I do not believe that much of the case set out in your letter for training in "generic urban type call-outs" stands closer examination.

The risk management framework set out in the Fire Service Act and the Forest and Rural Fires Act is clear with respect to this issue. The Fire Service Act provides Chief Fire Officers with the discretion to attend any incident, whether fire or non-fire, whether inside or outside a fire district, if the officer considers the brigade could render effective protection to life or property. Importantly, the Fire Service Act also limits the liability of the Chief Fire Officer and members of the brigade against the risk of civil litigation or criminal prosecution in the event of misadventure at a non-fire incident.

By contrast, the Forest and Rural Fires Act provides rural fire authorities with no discretion to attend incidents other than fires. Accordingly, Rural Fire Authorities and Principal Rural Fire Officers who authorise forces under their control to attend non-fire incidents are not indemnified in the event of misadventure. Worse, there is an argument to say that forces purporting to have a legislative mandate to attend certain classes of emergency incident when they do not are more exposed to litigation or prosecution in the event of misadventure.

I accept that Rural Fire Authorities like Waitakere have moved to minimise their exposure by insisting on high standards for training, protective clothing, and operational equipment but equally other authorities have not appreciated the risk. I also accept that the practical reality of the matter is very much as described in your letter – that there is a growing trend of rural fire forces attending non vegetation fire and non-fire incidents as though they were NZ Fire Service volunteer crews. However, I do *not* accept that this is good emergency service practice or that it makes sense from a national public policy perspective.

Working with communities to protect what they value.

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Let me explain my reasoning. In my role as National Commander I am responsible for establishing national performance standards for many aspects of service delivery – everything from protective clothing to reticulated water. A key standard I set involves attendance times at structure fires. In turn the attendance time standard drives much of the resource requirements of the NZ Fire Service – how many stations, their locations, how many trucks, how many crews, how many sets of protective clothing, how much training etc. That approach provides for consistent and coherent standards from one end of the country to the other, ensures reasonably equal levels of service for all communities, avoids unnecessary duplication and produces a quantifiable cost for resources.

I am now in the process of establishing a similar set of performance standards across the full range of generic urban type incidents. Many of these do not require the same rapid intervention as structure fires while others clearly do. You may be interested to note that some 95% of the total population live within 15 minutes of a NZ Fire Service fire station. That being the case it is not apparent to me that there is any logic in equipping and training a large number of other service providers in the capability to respond to generic type urban incidents where that capability already exists.

An important standard requiring more detailed consideration is attendance times for motor vehicle incidents. Clearly there are long lengths of highway around the country where the NZFS would be unable to meet an acceptable performance standard. In that situation I would propose to fill the gaps by contracting with appropriate service providers to ensure the standard could be met nationally. The contracted service providers might be the NZ Defence Force (who already provide coverage of much of the Desert Rd, by way of example), a strategically located voluntary rural fire force, a strategically located St John's ambulance brigade, the mines rescue trust, etc. Again this suggests that the requirement for training of voluntary rural fire force personnel in motor vehicle incident skills will be limited to a few strategically located forces. I am currently taking advice on the form of contractual arrangement necessary to extend the limitations of liability provided in the Fire Service Act to other providers under this sort of contractual arrangement.

Your letter asks if the Commission would facilitate the formation of a committee to investigate a national training policy for rural fire volunteer staff. I would be happy to facilitate the formation of such a committee to investigate rural volunteers' non-fire training needs within the indicative national performance standard structure I have outlined above. I would not support the investigation of training needs for every force that simply held itself out as wanting to provide a generic response capability.

I look forward to a response once you have consulted those rural firefighters on whose behalf you wrote. I have copied this letter to Dame Margaret Bazley, Chairperson of the New Zealand Fire Service Commission, Murray Dudfield National Rural Fire Officer, Don Roper, Executive Director UFBA and Bob Harvey, Mayor of Waitakere City Council.

Yours sincerely



**Mike Hall**  
Chief Executive/National Commander

Chief Executive	
Corporate Services	✓
City Services Moselle	
Consultancy Services	
ECO - WATER	
Strategic Group	
Consent Services	
Field Service...	

**A38**

12 August 2003.

Mike Hall  
Chief Executive/National Commander  
New Zealand Fire Service  
P O Box 2133  
Wellington.

Waitakere City Council  
Civic Centre  
6 Waipareira Ave  
Waitakere City

Private Bag 93109  
Henderson  
Waitakere City

Telephone  
09 836 8000  
Facsimile  
09 836 8001

**COPY FOR YOUR  
INFORMATION**

DX CX 10250 Auckland Mail Centre  
Email: info@waitakere.govt.nz

Dear Sir,

On behalf of the Volunteer Rural Fire Force units of the Auckland Region I wish to thank you for your very prompt reply to our letter requesting training assistance for volunteer rural staff.

Your reply thoroughly and comprehensively detailed your thoughts on the overall national situation regarding effective emergency incident coverage, which was of great interest and appreciated.

However, it was not intended in our request to present a case for the implementation of such wide-ranging policies. Our intent was to gain, through discussion with those parties directly concerned, a defined level of access to the training resources of the Fire Service for our operational volunteer crews.

Access to your resources would provide our staff with the basic knowledge and skill to allow them to carry out their usual duties "in the areas and to the levels required by their actual activities," to a proper level of competence and safety.

We are fully aware of the limitations of the Forest & Rural Fires Act regarding non-fire incidents, but also are aware that we have the responsibility for **all** fires occurring within our Fire Districts. Our ability to provide the training necessary to comply with the requirements of the Health & Safety in Employment Act, and meet the obligations of our Districts, is limited and requires the on-going co-operation of the Fire Service. Our request is aimed at gaining a more formal training arrangement, which would allow for the planned progression of our volunteer staff.

Your letter has been forwarded to the Volunteer Rural Fire Force units within the Auckland Region, and will be presented, as a report item on the agenda of the next Emergency Services Special Committee of the Waitakere City Council at its next meeting, for further consideration and reply.

I look forward to progressing the matter further with you following these Regional consultations.

Yours sincerely



Peter Barber  
P.R.F.O.  
Waitakere Rural Fire District.

Copies to;                      Dame Margaret Bazley                      F.S.C  
   Murray Dudfield                              N.R.F.A.  
   Don Roper                                      U.F.B.A.  
   Mayor Bob Harvey                            W.C.C.  
   Auckland Region: Volunteer Fire Force Units

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To Mayor Bob Harvey

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Copy to Manager : C.D.E.M.

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From Peter Barber : Principal Rural Fire Officer

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Date 13 August 2003.

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Subject Specialist Training ; Rural Fire

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Mayor Harvey,

For your clarification:

I understand that you have recently received a copy of a letter from Mike Hall (Chief Executive / National Commander) of the New Zealand Fire Service. The letter refers to a request for access to the Fire Service's training resources on behalf of the volunteer rural fire fighters of the Auckland Region.

I apologise if this matter was not brought to your, or Council's, attention from the outset, but as a matter involving rural fire volunteers throughout the Auckland Region it was considered that it could, and would, be best handled through discussion with those directly involved.

The matter as a whole has been forwarded as an agenda item for the next meeting of the Emergency Services Special Committee for their consideration.

Although the Fire Service has escalated the matter somewhat, we have confidence that the situation can be resolved to the satisfaction of all parties.

A40

Peter Barber

29 August 2002

The National Rural Fire Officer  
National Rural Fire Authority  
P O Box 2133  
WELLINGTON

Dear Murray

**RE: TRAINING – NZFS (AUCKLAND REGION)**

Earlier this year as a result of local demand, Peter Barber, PRFO, Waitakere, approached the Auckland Training Centre to 'tweek' the NZFS Phase 1 to suit a rural volunteer. This was duly done by staff at the training centre and Waitakere and Franklin Rural Fire Fighters hired the venue and instructors to train 18 staff. This proved to be beneficial for all concerned and all costs have subsequently been paid.

Following on from this success, plans were put in place to train 18 fire force personnel at the Pukekohe station using rural appliances and equipment. Dates were fixed and trainees advised. This however has now been cancelled by the Training Centre (see attached correspondence). Clearly there is a break down within the NZFS that requires immediate rectification.

It is obvious that such trainings are beneficial for all concerned and follows initiatives such as:

- Regional Incident Management Teams (RIMT's)
- Joint Agency Training Teams (JATT)
- C.I.M.S.

Please advise how best this can be 'put back on track'.

Yours faithfully

Mark Ball  
PRFO

Copy F.Y.I

Mark

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