

New fire legislation

Rural fire fighting

As Greater Wellington Regional Council is not a fire authority under the Rural Fires Act it does not have a legal requirement to provide a fire response under the Act. We do, however, maintain a fire response capability in order to ensure an initial response to any incidents in over 50,000 hectares of farm, park, plantation and natural forest land.

The Regional Council would be prepared to support a change in legislation and management systems around fire response if it could be assured the existing level of service would be maintained or enhanced. However, from the framework it is difficult to ascertain whether or not this would be the case as it lacks sufficient detail regarding implementation. Until this is provided the Council neither supports nor opposes the proposed framework. Therefore it agrees with Local Government NZ's submission providing conditional support pending further detail. A satisfactory level of service for rural fire response is our primary concern.

In taking more of a national approach to fire and rescue services, it is possible that insufficient attention and resourcing may be paid to rural fire fighting. To ensure this does not happen, the Council submits:

- Fighting of rural fires should be specifically covered in the legislation
- The new fire and rescue service organisation should have a requirement to develop specific performance measures regarding the resourcing and fighting of rural fires with affected parties and the outcomes should be reported annually.

Funding mechanisms

With regard to the proposed funding mechanisms, this Council is unable to form a view on the impact to the regional ratepayer apart from the fact that the new funding mechanisms appear to be widening the revenue catchment base while maintaining the same or similar level of response.

It is interesting to note, however, that if the rates proposed by the new funding mechanism are applied, this organisation would incur an additional \$180,000 (approximately) in annual insurance premiums. If that were extrapolated on a nationwide basis, this Council would be concerned that the cost of administering the new fire management system would far outweigh the benefits proposed by it.

The Council submits, as part of the transition to the new system, that there must be transparency over both the total amount of revenue required before and after the transition, and a detailed breakdown of where this revenue comes from. This information should be made publicly available.

The Council also submits that mechanisms are required to ensure that those organisations who insure their New Zealand property overseas are not able to freeload but pay appropriate levies for fire and rescue service operations.

Motor vehicle levies

Some of the objectives of the changes are about fairness, minimising administrative and compliance costs, and ensuring revenue is obtained from a wide base. The proposal to collect a motor vehicle levy through third party motor vehicle insurance does not seem to be efficient in that it does not collect from those who decide not to take third party insurance or large organisations who self-insure their motor vehicle fleet.

Charging the levy through the motor vehicle registration process would cast the net wider and be more efficient. There is a parallel here in that the Accident Compensation Corporation levy for motor vehicle accidents is collected through the vehicle registration process.

The Council submits that motor vehicle levies should be collected through the vehicle registration charge in a similar way that the ACC levy is collected.

Exempt property categories

The consultation document indicates that the exempt properties contained in the current legislation would be reviewed. There are currently 21 categories exempt under the current Act. Many of these are infrastructure assets and this Council would be concerned if it was required to pay fire levies on the likes of its concrete water reservoirs.

The Council submits that any review of exempt property categories should involve public consultation.

David Benham
Chief Executive