The Forest Owners Association (FOA)/Farm Forestry Association (FFA) Fire Committee (FBC) held its first quarterly meeting on 4 March. The following summary highlights key topics the Committee wishes to share from the meeting.

FMO Agreement Review

The Committee considered whether current Forest Management Organisation (FMO) agreements are delivering consistent and effective wildfire response capability. While FMO agreements are not considered to be failing, performance was seen as variable across regions and overly dependent on individuals rather than nationally consistent systems. The Committee supported establishing an industry-led working group to review current FMO KPIs and performance, identify common issues, and distinguish matters best addressed locally versus nationally. Issues requiring systemic change will be escalated to the FOA Executive for engagement with Fire and Emergency New Zealand (FENZ).

Industry Survey Report

Draft results from the Industry Fire Capability Survey were presented, highlighting significant sector investment in fire prevention, training, and response capability, alongside regional variability and emerging workforce risks. The survey was recognised as a critical evidence base for engagement with FENZ, DOC, and policymakers. Progression to finalisation and publication was supported, with the report anticipated to be finalised and published over the coming months.

Contractor Insurance Issue

Concerns were raised about uncertainty in insurance coverage for contractor plant and equipment used in firefighting, and the potential for uninsured loss or liability. The discussion noted that this issue may also affect contractors engaged by FENZ more broadly. Further work was agreed to clarify whether this is an issue, the extent of any associated risk, and whether regulatory engagement may be required.

FENZ Update

Updates were provided on FENZ work programmes covering training, capability mapping, equipment hire guidance, fire prevention initiatives, and organisational change. Of note, decisions on organisational restructuring have been deferred to allow further consideration of stakeholder feedback. Ongoing engagement is focused on improving alignment, clarifying expectations, and ensuring rural and forestry wildfire capability is clearly understood and recognised.

Wildfire Hazard Tool

A new online Wildfire Hazard Tool is being developed by the Bioeconomy Science Institute to improve landowner awareness of location-specific wildfire hazard. The tool is intended to support understanding of baseline hazard rather than real-time fire danger, forecasting, or operational decision-making. The need for clear framing and alignment with existing fire danger ratings and public messaging was emphasised to avoid confusion. It was also noted that modelled outputs may not always align with local experience, and care will be required to manage interpretation and prevent unintended secondary use (e.g. by insurers).

Spontaneous Combustion

Spontaneous combustion at skid sites remains a recognised risk, particularly following wet periods combined with subsequent hot, windy conditions. Research and operational experience indicate that risk is influenced by material type, compaction, moisture variation, and site-specific factors. There is interest in improving awareness, retaining operational knowledge, and exploring whether weather or site data could support advisory or early-warning approaches. Changes in climatic variables mean this is a risk that forest owners should be aware of and actively managing and mitigating.

OroraTech Presentation (https://ororatech.com/**)**

Satellite-based wildfire detection technology was presented as an example of emerging tools used internationally for early detection of rural and landscape-scale fires. The technology may have potential application for New Zealand's large forestry estates, particularly for early detection. Any further consideration would require assessment of sector interest, governance arrangements, cost-sharing and data access, and how such tools might complement existing systems. This solution would have benefits across all rural and remote land uses.